They are sending me back to the special-ed room.

Vane Vander

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poems by Vane Vander

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To anyone who's tired of the onslaught of "feel-good" nonsense from "creators" on TikTok

I am physically incapable of doing anything in half-measures

I want to take the authors
of chapbooks
and the occasional
journal submission
by the shoulders
and ask them

how do you stand
only doing this part-time
as a hobby?
how'd you avoid
making it an identity?
is it something
only neurotypicals
are capable
of

just dash off some poems for fun
another line in a resume

I want to fling myself into the sun
when I haven't written for a day

I am being medically experimented on by the shadow government

Why does God allow bad things to happen?
"So we can take part in the joy of creation."
Oh, good. I'm so glad
that God has a plan
to make something with my infected
bellybutton.

Catskull

Various things are occurring at all times.
Like this morning, when I found my father
and asked him to re-inflate my bike
tires.
He told me he would, once he moved the car
out of the garage. Flashed the lights.
Without warning started backing it out.
I jumped back,
crashed
into a pile of chairs.
One moment my splayed legs, the next a tire.

Don't you just want to commit vehicular
manslaughter? Don't you just desire
to run the fuck over your least favorite
daughter?
Even if just a leg? A foot? A big toe?

Ignition off. "What are you talking about?"

I cannot be-leaf it

Four small children
under the age of seven
assigned to rake up the rain of autumn
but have all decided instead
to take up the weapons
meant for the lawn
and beat each other over the head.
One reigns triumphant,
one's in a sob,
and one's a baby
with no idea of
what's going on.
The eldest, the victor,
comes up to my throne
with what I assume was once a home
for butterflies, the door bent wide open,
the cage stuffed with dirt and nutrition
for pests. She shakes it in my direction.
None of the leaves will fall out the door,
everything inside's so tightly compacted.
"How come
none of them
will bow to Queen Eleanor?"
I think your
flock of bees
is too scared to leave.

I am a target of a harassment campaign by the shadow government's police

"That's all I ask.
Talk to me first
before you do something rash."
I'd made her that promise,
or at least said the words
on some day I'd forgotten.
Now, after the crash,
surrounded by cops
in the parking lot,
I put up my hands
and try to strike a deal:
"We'll come with you peacefully
under two conditions:
you keep me and my wife together,
and, when we're pardoned,
you bring us home after."
Jett elbows me.
"What are you doing, Lethe?
It's just a stress dream.
All you need to do to escape
is wake
up."

I am the only literate person in this family

"We need a vegetable to go with this dinner."
Mom shifts her feet and opens the cupboard.
"I'm thinking I'll stir in a can of sweet peas."
She pulls out a can of wilted green beans.
Without bothering to read the label,
she rips the lid off, then stifles frustration.
"What in the world? This isn't what I wanted."

I am apparently responsible for other people's messes

"There's a puddle on my carpet!"
Thanks for putting it in a group text.
Let me hop on my tired
bike and ride an hour
from the next town over
and spend the whole time making a guess
at what you want me
to do about it.

I have been taken into custody by the shadow government

"So what are *you* in the parental
correction center
for?
Did you call your mother a brazen whore?
Did you post death threats on Twitter?
Get caught drinking underage
or stealing money from their dresser?
Do something that means you can't graduate
from high school on schedule?
Or something mundane, like refusing chores?"

No, nothing of the sort.

"Aye, you look too old for those tricks.
Did you refuse to get steady employment?
Air out some private drama to the public?
Or something simple, like being gay?
I've seen too many dykes in this place
of everything innocent
but still committed
because their parents were hardline
Christians."

Yes, I'm a lesbian, but
that's not what
I've been convicted
of.

"Come on, then, sister!
I'm begging you, tell me!
We'll be stuck in this hole for a while.
We might as well get friendly."

I told my brother
I'd use a solar
death ray on his wiener.

I am nothing but a mirror

Under the logic that you've taught me,
it's only fair that I should get
to confiscate your belongings
that would allow you to check
on the welfare of your friends;
to form opinions and express
them without okays from your parents,
never mind that they are dead;
to see other ways of living
outside the conservative.

Under the protocols you've hewn,
it's only fair I should refuse
to discuss your sins with you
'til all family's settled in
for maximum humiliation.
Oh, you say you get the point?
That you're ready to submit
to whatever arbitrary
deletion that I should deign
acceptable? I give no damns.
I'm drawing this out for as long as I can.
"Your penance shall dance
another day."

Stop crying when I take your computer,
your phone, your tablets, even your
watch. You brought this down upon yourself
when you decided to post to your Twitter
that God must have plucked my soul straight
out of Hell.
It's called "living
ideologically

consistently".
You should try
it sometime.
You'll have the space now I've forced you
offline.

Federal law prohibits the transfer of this drug to any person other than the patient for whom it was prescribed

The ground is not so weary
except for that it denies me
any chance of achieving
a decent night's sleep.
The tiniest shard of light
from a power indicator,
kitchen light left on upstairs,
the alarm clock
ticking on,
in orange vogue, the hours.
No need for it; my bladder,
every five minutes, alerts
me that I'm full to bursting.
I almost want to punch it and say,
"I can see the game
you're trying to play.
And I'm not going to participate."
But, last time, refusal's cost was
a vague dampness
in my boxers.
Of course it's stress incontinence.
I should be able to claim on my taxes
the work that it takes to soothe it to sleep,
the charity, lack of compensation.
Up three, four, sometimes *five* times.
I'm the queen of bedtime exercise.
I should start stealing the tranquilizers
the family doctor prescribed to my mother.
I bet she keeps it by the nasal
saline and the sildenafil

All I've done is change my position

and now I've lost
my train of thought.
God damn it.

Monosodium glutamate

I'm sitting at the counter
right beside my little brother
as he shovels mac-and-cheese into his seven-foot mouth.
He's an iPad baby,
though he gets awful angry
when I point out that, as he sleepwalks around the house,
he's always got some video or another in his face.
"You know they won't let you do that when you go to work on trains."

Anyways, for him it's another night where's verboten
any thoughts not pre-approved by the suits at Disney.
Something comical happens, but he fails to start laughing.
He glances at me. "Stop looking at me like I'm stupid."

"Do you understand the joke *behind* 'gluteus maximus'?
He meant to say 'glutamate'; that stuff's in the food you eat.
That he said the term wrong should be blatantly obvious,
but it's also funny since that's the muscle in the *butt*cheeks."

Mona I

Mona approaches, so I yell, "No touching!"
She leers at me, lip curled: "What are you, a painting?
Should I put you in frame
made of wood and then hang
you up on the wall for everybody else to see?"

I am being sent back to the special-ed room

I wake up.
I suffer
the horrors
nigh-incomprehensible
of living in a world designed for
neurotypicals.
I go back to sleep.

The console end of an A/V cord
brushes my cheek. I choose to ignore
it.
It's been almost two decades since
The Incident, and I'd like to think
you've made me well aware of your malice.
Between trying to blind me with lasers
and strangling me with the controller
cords,
I can't imagine for the life of me what more
you could possibly want as penance.
How long do I need
to endure the pain?
How much must I suffer
'fore I can sleep without the shame?
I've apologized.
I've tried to make right.
But I did no harm then,
so I can't comprehend
why, eighteen years later, you're still my
sleep demon.

How am I supposed to console
the grudges of a console?
Is it even possible?

I wake up.
"Someone online's using exotic words
without explaining the meanings to me first!
Someone's post contains a strange phrase
that's inflicting discomfort on my brain!"
None of you fuckers tag your posts properly.
Blind them with asterisks, so I can't screen
them out by term. Oops, we changed
the range
of socially acceptable responses again.
We'll crucify you if you express disdain.
Let's socially ostracize retards with mama.
Here's seventeen more fanarts of a game
you've decided you have zero interest in.
A funny video
with the most
irritating music
ever concocted
in the basement
of the RIAA.
I turn off my phone. A rich asshole lady
invites me for pizza, then slaps me in the
face.
Men write fanfictions
of how I've written
not a single thing in the past seven
years. The county worker on the phone
speaks down to me in a babyish tone.
Mouths masticating.
Brother's masturbating
to Roblox again, and the whole home
can hear every word, every grunt, every moan.
Mom cranks up the central heating to eleven.
I can't sleep under more than a thin blanket.
Express an opinion? Might as well be Satan.
They're locking me up in the special ed

room again, in the Garden of Eden.
"I don't care that you *know* it's an apple.
Repeat it."

Fuck, give me the terror harmless
of turning on my father's PlayStation
without remembering to first insert a disk.
At least it won't call me a stupid bitch.

I know what a sock is

"Cringey, which one do you want more?
To go to bed, or to eat my apple core?"
He stares at me, blank, ignoring the sock
lying in the middle of the kitchen floor.
His answer's almost always the latter.
Who can blame him? Human knowledge over
being locked
away in a cage
until my father
wakes up in five hours
to go earn us a monthly wage.

My mother walks in to observe
in hopes I'm about to do something stupid
deserving of a lecture.
"Why's there a sock at my feet?"
Generally, to keep them warm,
I'd say if I were braver.
"Oh – nevermind, *I* left this there.
I was doing a load of laundry earlier.
This one's *my* fault."
She wooshes her arms.
"I'm a mom genius! Feel my brain power!"

No noticable change in the atmosphere.

My herd

There is no evidence
that Marie Antoinette
built a fake farm to play at being peasant.
But there *is* a mess
to prove I'm impatient
all over the floor of my laundry room. Now
I'm milking the legs of my seventeen leggings.
The stretched mutant teats of a wastewater
cow.

An angry wine mom's angry daughter

What the heck do you mean,
a wine
can be dry?
There's nothing dry about it. It's a *liquid*.
If I trip and spill it
all over your jeans,
you'll be sopping wet
and have another reason
to think me an idiot.
There'd be nothing hilarious
about the situation.
Maybe they mean it'd be cut-and-dried.
As shrimple as that. The only thing honest
in my life.

"Yeah, she has been, recently."
Mother drips sauce onto her white shirt.
Chases it down with sparkling water.
I completely forgot we had a chandelier.
"She's been going upstairs and being naughty.
I can tell 'cause she always leaves behind
fur.
Which is the whole reason I don't want her up
there."
She side-eyes me. "Come on, it's dinner-
time. You can choke the dog later."
I thought it a hug. My arm 'round his neck,
never so tight
that it cuts off his windpipe,
but just snug enough that he doesn't bite
me or run off to beg under the table.
I thought I was doing us all a favor.
Apparently not. I set him free.
He immediately scurries under Grandma's feet.
Blood spatter, red sauce. Entrails, egg
noodles.
Canine forensics dash to the crime scene.
Only you can prevent kitchen tragedies.

Dinner foods

Jett, I need your help brainstorming.
You know that ancient meme
that goes, "NTs when you eat
a breakfast food later in the day,"
and it shows a man smiling,
and the next panel says,
"NTs when you eat a dinner
food for breakfast," and he appears
to have died inside? Well, my mother
is the epitome of that theory,
and I harbor a deep desire to drive her
insane.
But peanut butter and jelly's passé,
and pizza rolls are almost a cliché
she's come to expect from me.
I need something easy to make.
"A bowl of mac and cheese?"

I barely own the objects in my room

Greetings, neighbor!
We sent you this flyer
to inform you that we have recently bought
far more inventory
than our store full of pity
can hold, and we thought
that through the ancient art of guilt-tripping
we could somehow convert this into *your*
problem.
So please, if you have a shred of mercy
(and several thousand dollars of money)
we would like you to kindly relieve
us of all our misfortunes. *But hurry!*
Deals end soon! And we wouldn't want
you to miss these deals so generously hot
that even the devil himself could not resist
buying more furniture than his whole house can
fit.

I will die

Four men
convalesce
on an all-weather
porch for comfort,
each deciding whether to comport
with each other
about their reports
on the tropes of authors.
Said the American,
"I'll die for freedom."
Said the Briton,
"I'll die for honour,
but on the condition
it's spelled
with a U towards the end."
"I will die for love," said
the one who was French.
"Speaking of that, whatever happened
to the women
we were promised
would be in this poem?"
The three talking heads
turned towards the Russian,
needling him with alcoholic eyes.
The last to speak shrugged. "I suppose I will
die."

Shift + tab

It felt wonderful to let go,
to be alive but not have
to be in control.
To view with new eyes
the world I had passed
all time before now,
perched in the sky,
neck kinked, peering down
at. The wrinkles in a hand,
the vents in a pool,
the claustrophobia of a school
with only ten or so student lockers
whose only purpose was to hang stickers
on.
And maybe stalk classmates to ask out to prom.

Prom happens every single Saturday.
I hope you didn't have any plans made.

I can't say I enjoy having blind spots.
I should feel safer –
in this world there's no murder
or blood-drawing acts of violence –
but I could still get jumpscared
by the presence of who makes me wonder
how it's not a crime
that they're still alive.
Calling a vampire to fix this mistake.
"Today only, all urns are half-price."

In the same pose

Somewhere in the neighborhood of fifty degrees
or some other absurd thing I could never
achieve
in a single lifetime.
Less than gentle, the breeze,
but the dogs don't seem to mind,
curled up underneath
the shadow of the woodpile.
A lumpy oval, each.
Tail tucked around the behind.
Hind on front to form a frame.
Head tucked tight inside.
At least, 'til from the bench I rise
to try to get a picture.
One raises her head, thinking maybe Father's
home.
"No! Go back to sleep!
You were both
in the same pose!"

Starlime

If you weren't in my life,
I'd want you to be a constellation
in my sky.
So what if that means
not being
alive?
Existence is pleasant
as balls of hydrogen
burning hundreds of light-years apart.
Drifting too slowly to be noticed
by naked eyes on the scale of the humans.
A skeleton, a laundry rack
that exists to have legends attached
to it. The most primitive of all TVs.
If nothing else, a guide on the high seas.
The Earth rotates too slowly
to be doomscrolling
through the timeline
of our demise.
Get an adblocker, though: many have seen
the Candy Crush devs projecting
ads into the night.

I prefer to respect our botanical neighbors

It would be an insult to flowers
to call your writing "flowery".
Flowers are a fundamental part
of garden ecology.
It'd be like comparing
a Jackson Pollock painting
to a truck stop meant for insects.
Yes, one is by far prettier
and the other thorny and grittier
(and probably has much less shit on the
floor),
but when I visit the latter
I find pollinators
refueling on nectar
and exchanging pollen
for haulin'
to other plants
for seed production.
(Is there a secret section
somewhere in the back for... magazines?)
A flower's straightforward. It keeps no
secrets.
Pollen from anther to stigma - that's it.
You, on the other hand, eat verbosity
to the point that you drown all who come near.
A wise kid once told me that bees prefer
to not fly in the rain. Do your part to save
nature.

Supervision

Dear diary,
I forgot to write yesterday
in between the self-flagellation
and the notes about my dream from that morning
that, a few days ago, I saw
my neighbor friend in her backyard, abandoned
with a bonfire raging, and I thought
to give her company,
or at least be
a responsible adult in the vicinity,
and when she saw me plodding
across the sea of dead grass and leaves,
she fled and left her toys behind,
and I felt bad, and I sat beside
the pile of dolls and accessories,
and then she came back
with two packets of fruit snacks,
one for each hand,
and handed one to me.
"I wanted a snack.
And I thought you'd be hungry."

Captain or mermaid

Hey, Jett. What's on your mind?
Because you know you're on mine!

"Was that supposed to be a pick-up line?

Two can play at being mortified.

If you were a book brand-new to the library
and someone already had you out on loan,
I'd force them at gunpoint to bring you back home
so *I* could check you out."
You'd have to return me, though.

And I know you couldn't bear to let me go.

"If you were an e-book, and you hadn't been
leaked on any sites known for piracy,
I'd threaten
every person
who had you on hold
until the loan fulfilled on my end
and I could rip you all for my own."
Aren't I worthy
of spending money?

"Now you're just playing Adversary.
You abhor the publishing industry."
I gotta get under your skin *somehow*.
In certain warm places, preferably.

Stasis over servitude

"So I built a copper golem in my castle
so he could arrange the items in my chests.
Problem is, he somehow turned invisible.
And I can't use cheats to find out where he is
because I want to earn achievements
on that world." Brother sighs. "Guess I'll
trip
over his foot every now and then.
He oxidized. Poor dude. He can't even
do the single thing that I made him for."
Slow left turn by the fairgrounds. Someone
has left the back fence unlocked. Through the
necrosis between me and the neat row of
barns, I can, if I turn my head, espy
a single, barren, jade pair of eyes.

I will one day be shot dead by a Nintendo-affiliated sniper unit

The role of copyright
is to allow corporations
to beat you over the head.
See, it's perfectly fine for them
to churn out the same film
in a thousand
different
configurations
to the tune of hundreds
of millions of box office profits.
But the gods of Marvel forbid
you find some inspiration
in corpo-globo-capeshit-moid slop
or whatever
artificial
abomination
Disney's decided to force on the children
and make something of it, no matter how
derivative.
How dare even the most small-brained person,
the most starved-of-imagination,
walk off the beaten path of their assigned
consumption ritual farm feeding method.
"I spent several months making a video game
based on my childhood favorite franchise!
And I'm giving the whole thing away for no
fee!"
Nintendo will take your ass to the Pearly
Gates
and demand your soul as the remedy
for the damages you caused. Who will buy
Super Mario Brothers number nine-

thousand-seven-hundred-and-seventy-three
if you made a romhack of a game from the '80s?
All the indie devs
will starve to death,
and the twelve-follower
jetsetters
of the hashtag Resistance
will be made homeless
and forced to wander like JeSUS,
and it'll be all *your* fault, you piece of
shit.

Jesus Factory

Every Easter
we hire
Sisyphus
to roll away the stone
in front of Jesus'
grave.
Master of the job,
second to none,
so that's why to him we gave
the responsibility
of moving
The Rock.
Ever since that first year
deep in antiquity,
they just keep respawning.
We have to release
them, or the Easter
economy will collapse,
cut off from its drip-feed
of Christs
to sacrifice.
Like a Thanksgiving if we slaughtered no turkeys.
Three hundred sixty two days, then crucify,
preferably in a mild summer heat.
Add lemon to taste.

Mona II

"Robin Hood is a fox, and
Pinocchio and Woody toys."
Smores individually wrapped
in anticipation for party's feast;
most, I believe,
will go to waste.
Brother
covered
in pumpkin seeds
and guts glomped in the garage.
My new friend holds my flickering gaze.
"Am I writing this poem right?
A bunch of disconnected thoughts
intended to string the reader along?"
That, or meaning to ask after the
statement on whiteboard at the beginning.
What is the context? What deeper meaning?
But the train
from brain
to throat has stopped
non-essential operations
for the night,
perhaps sensing that conversation's
partners are unlikely to provide
straightforward answers that I'll like.
Your choices are clacking or condescension
or perhaps coherent but lacking connection.
The more that I reach out, the more I'm marked
separate.

Mona asks that we stay behind
after all are finished with the hay ride
for a group picture. I decline

the politest that I can scrounge up.
She opts not to fight me. This time.

Pica

"What's got you still up so late at night,
Lethe?
You've spent the last ten minutes staring
at the blank wall instead of performing
your usual bedtime routine."
My presence tears holes in the fabric of
reality.

The mattress I had back in 2020 -
well, one day at my parents' behest
I flipped it over so that I could wreck
the other side just as good as the first.
If I'm an ocean, then that was my sonar,
my weight carving both a trough and a crest.
But the bottom side was full of holes.
My dad took it into the garage to dissect
it. Stripped it bare to a rib cage of springs.
The vultures found no evidence of rodents.
But how do you explain the holes otherwise?
It's not like *I* was eating what was inside.

And now look at my sheets.
Right where my heart lies,
there are several holes, none the same size.
I bet, if I turned *this* mattress over,
it'd be like staring at someone through a
mirror:
you see the same thing, but indirectly.
Facing different ways, but still meeting eyes.

What are you doing with my phone?
"Writing it all down so that, come tomorrow,
you don't start to spiral
from not having written."

Maybe it's pica, and I've a taste for linen?

I feel like an automaton

No thoughts, head empty.
I think this routine
is starting
to kill me.
And not in the "I'm fucking off to Sablade"
way,
but more like "I haven't written in five days
and I'm looking forward
to the end of November
so I can take a nap, maybe for forever."
I was trying to lose cells from fat, not my
brain.
I wanted to resist stagnation,
complacency, not insulin.
Not fog but clear cerebral weather.
I forgor 💀 what it's like to be human.
I'm going to explode.
I need to slow
down
before I burn out.
Gods, I *hope* the answer
isn't staring into a screen
for seventeen
more hours.
A screen for work. A screen for reading.
A screen to write to the manager
of the downward spiral I find myself in.
Shit

that's myself, isn't it?
Dear self: may I please
be released
from all sense of guilt, now and forever?

Mona III

"Yes, I love my daughter,
who is *so* independent.
But she thinks a car
and a grocery-store candy bar
cost the same amount.
She'll never be able to make a budget."
It was not foreign knowledge
that you saw us as deficient,
but *holy shit*,
you didn't need
to make it so explicit.
Call it a social club – more like your
personal menagerie.
Put us all up on display so that the Catholics
can agree
the only thing that we were ever good at was
being a symbol.
Pull out your checkbooks, or all these retards
are going to Hell.

(narrator) It turns out later her weight was just fluctuating!

Starving myself for fun and profit
(although is it profit if you seek a loss?)
because my father re-planned that, since Mom
has suddenly become so damnably sick,
we won't be staying overnight after all.
Maybe, *perhaps*, tomorrow three hours
in Father's car, packed tight in close quarters
so we can all share in Mother's misery.
"We can all be sick together! What quality
family time! I'll go put on the Muppets."
Two hundred and forty-five pounds. I'm down ten.
It'd be nice to have control over my body.
A hostile presence
to beat into submission.
Give thanks that I deserve such cruelty.

I am looking at myself in the mirror

The blackhead
is back again.
It sits
on my upper lip.
I think I'm gonna lose my shit,
because I can't evict
the pore by squeezing – it's
wedged too far in –
and if I poke it with
a tool, I just get surrounding skin.
It's large enough that I can see it,
but just small enough that if
I try to make it go away,
I'll just cause myself pain
and redness, soreness, maybe swelling,
and all to no benefit.
Can't afford microsurgery,
and even if I could, it'd be
a waste of money since the thing
would just come back the next morning.

I will show up at the club with fifteen books 'stead of just one

Only books with black and gold covers.
Only books where it's been well over
five years since I imported them into
my e-book library. List where I eschew
anything not poetry or the assigned
theme for writer's club that month. I
want to spend a year studying
lesbian fiction and history.
Only children's series I didn't
finish for yet-unknown reasons.
(I'm sure I'll remember five minutes in.)
All the books I haven't marked "read" yet.
Finish what you have. If need be, pretend
there'll be no more downloading ever again.

Terra

When I die
for the final time,
slip me into a ROM bank within
a world clearly broken but still worth saving,
a world I can resuscitate in an endless
loop. I won't even notice when you reset
the game to play it all over again.
I can make a million predefined choices
and never truly feel the consequences.
Only fictional characters can be perfect,
said the Discordians, since only they
can live flawless lives, can truly be
finished.
When I die, let me live a paradox
for as long as the cartridge
and the hardware to read it
still function:
developers have all my paths in place,
yet there is no permanent "finished" state,
no option to prevent the "new game",
no option to make unplayable Sisyphus.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

VANE VANDER has probably accidentally inhaled enough aerosolized wax over her lifetime to make a decent firestarter. She spends her time fighting burnout, burning things, and getting burned online. She can be found making others reconsider their life choices at mayvaneday.org.

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